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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 000089

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR (RANDALL BUDDEN, BRIAN NICHOLS)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR SOCI ABLD AMGT ENRG KCOR KCRM

JM, VZ, CU, XL, XK

SUBJECT: JAMAICA: OPPOSITION LEADER CLAIMS VENEZUELA GIVING
\$5-6 MILLION IN CASH TO INFLUENCE OUTCOME OF UPCOMING
NATIONAL ELECTIONS

REF: 06 KINGSTON 2150

Classified By: Ambassador Brenda L. Johnson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary and Action Requested

1.(C) Opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Leader Bruce Golding claims that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is providing US\$5-6 million in cash to Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller's ruling People's National Party (PNP) to influence the outcome of national elections, which must be held by the end of this year, but which Golding now believes she will call in February. While espousing confidence in a JLP victory, Golding says Venezuelan money could prove crucial in several key marginal constituencies. He would welcome any U.S. assistance in either intercepting the Venezuelan money or, if it already has reached Jamaica, exposing it. Golding is interested in visiting Washington to outline his perspective on the future direction of Jamaica-U.S. relations, in which he seeks significant improvement; post supports such a visit, and requests Department's approval.
End Summary and Action Requested.

2.(U) Ambassador (accompanied by Poloff) paid a courtesy call on Opposition Leader Bruce Golding and Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Chairman Karl Samuda at JLP Headquarters the afternoon of January 16; Golding and Samuda shared views on a wide range of issues.

NEC and Kingston's Mayor

3.(C) In response to Ambassador's inquiry, Golding said he had seen a copy of Kingston Mayor Desmond McKenzie (JLP)'s recent letter of complaint addressed to her regarding the USAID annex and parking situation around the new embassy compound (NEC) in Liguanea. The Ambassador reiterated that the USG was in the process of obtaining all approvals and building permits required for the new USAID annex, and that actual construction of the building had not yet begun. Golding suggested that the Embassy "stay in frequent touch" with the building superintendent and city engineers to avoid misunderstandings. The Ambassador assured him the Embassy would do so, and noted that the parking issue raised by the Mayor was unrelated to the USAID annex, and could only be

resolved by city authorities enforcing parking laws. The Ambassador then observed that construction of the new annex was in everyone's interest, given USAID's vital role in Jamaica. Golding and Samuda agreed, and said they were sure any questions could be "amicably resolved."

National Elections in February?

4.(C) The Ambassador observed that the latest opinion polls had shown a rise in Golding's popularity. He responded by downplaying the importance of such polls, and then said the JLP was "preparing for the possibility of early elections," which were "now being contemplated for next month." He cited three reasons Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller (PSM)'s ruling People's National Party (PNP) may call elections prior to the start of the Cricket World Cup (CWC) series in March:

(A) The PNP sensed that its popularity now was weakening, and probably would continue to do so. PSM therefore may opt to hold elections to avoid further slippage.

(B) CWC now appeared less likely to work in the Government's political favor. Ticket sales were not as strong as had been hoped, and the package of matches to be played in Jamaica was not impressive; only the Pakistan-West Indies match scheduled for March 13 would attract great interest. Moreover, the special CARICOM CWC visa was proving problematic.

(C) The Government would be unable to avoid enactment of a tax package before the end of this year, and would not want to do so in the run-up to national elections. CWC precluded holding elections in March/April; therefore, February was a real possibility. If elections were not held then, the PNP probably would wait until the end of the year.

Allegations of Venezuelan Cash to Influence Election Campaign

5.(C) Golding then claimed to have credible information from a "virtually impeccable" source that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez was providing US\$5-6 million in cash to the PNP to influence the outcome of the upcoming national election. Since he had first hinted of this publicly several days ago, he understood there had been considerable "finger-pointing" within the inner circles of the PNP, which realized an informer must have passed this information to him. Golding said he understood that the money would be provided in the form of U.S. currency and would be routed from Venezuela via Cuba to Jamaica using a diplomatic pouch. He was uncertain which country's pouch would be used, or whether the money already may have reached Jamaica. Use of the diplomatic pouch would provide a degree of "insulation," which was "worrying." He understood that Jamaican customs officials were empowered to open a diplomatic pouch only if they had very strong evidence that it was being misused for criminal purposes.

6.(C) The Ambassador then noted that, as she had departed for New York on January 8, at the Kingston airport she had encountered Minister of Commerce and Industry Philip Paulwell (a close associate of PSM and powerful PNP figure) and an accompanying party departing for Havana. Paulwell had not indicated the purpose of his visit to Cuba; it was not inconceivable that he had been traveling there to bring back the Venezuelan money.

7.(C) Golding then claimed the JLP sensed "a puff of wind in our sails" and was confident of victory in the upcoming elections; yet, he was worried that the PNP's use of Venezuelan money could prove crucial in several key marginal constituencies. Samuda said there was "no question" of Venezuela having used money in an effort to influence the political direction of countries in the region; Chavez himself had confirmed it. He had interfered in recent elections in Peru, Bolivia, and Guatemala. In St. Lucia, he had funneled money to Kenny Anthony, who had used it to telecast public meetings and rallies in their entirety;

however, the high literacy rate and comparative sophistication of the electorate had prevented his victory. Many rural and inner-city Jamaicans were not as sophisticated, and thus were susceptible to manipulation.

8.(C) Golding then suggested that the U.S. could assist by either helping to intercept the Venezuelan money or, if it already had reached Jamaica, helping to expose it. He acknowledged that this may not be easy, as he understood the money was being sent in the form of "raw" U.S. currency with no paper trail. He would "love to mute the effort by making the information public," but unfortunately "much of the information is anecdotal." In itself, the Venezuelan money "would not be decisive;" however, it could "make it a challenge in certain marginal seats." Samuda then said Chavez had resented the JLP's principled opposition to Jamaica's involvement in the Petrocaribe scheme, and wanted to keep the JLP out of power by any means possible. The Ambassador noted that the recent drop in oil prices was not working in Chavez's favor; Samuda agreed, but said that he still had plenty of flexibility.

9.(C) The Ambassador then noted that recent reports from Spanish doctors had indicated that Fidel Castro was gravely ill; major changes were afoot in Cuba, and by extension in the region as a whole. Golding and Samuda agreed.

10.(C) Golding then said he was "going on the road next week," and would "stay on the road until we are in Jamaica House" (the Prime Minister's Office). He then observed that, while there had been "a lot of criticism of P.J. Patterson" as Prime Minister, "at least P.J. knew where he was going." In contrast, PSM and other current PNP leaders lacked the "internal cohesiveness necessary for effective governance; if she wins, she still will have no clear pathway." Samuda then asked whether we had sensed the confusion and anti-U.S. drift within the current Government; the Ambassador acknowledged that the Embassy had "had some disturbing meetings" with PNP officials, and noted that at the U.N. in recent years, Jamaica had voted with the U.S. only 12 percent of the time. Golding recalled that, when he had visited the Department two years ago, he had discussed the dramatic changes which had swept the world over the last fifteen years. In some ways, the U.S. had lost influence within the hemisphere. Jamaica now was "fighting with a larger pool of nations" for USG attention; in this regard, its recent voting record at the U.N. was "not helpful."

Suggested Visit to Washington

11.(C) Golding then asked if he might soon visit Washington to "outline my own perspective on the direction of Jamaica-U.S. relations." The U.S. was "too near, and too much of our future is tied to the U.S., for indifference." He then recalled an incident some years ago when reckless allegations had been floated in the U.S. Congress accusing former Prime Minister Edward Seaga of involvement in narco-trafficking. He had placed a phone call to the White House, which within twenty-four hours had come out with a strong statement in support of Seaga in a press conference. That was the kind of close relationship he wanted Jamaica to maintain with the U.S. While the "old-style socialists" of the PNP no longer pursued an economic agenda of centralized control, they nevertheless remained "cold toward the U.S." The Ambassador responded positively to the idea of a visit to Washington, and said she would forward this overture to Department. She agreed that the bilateral relationship should be as close as it had been during the Seaga years, and noted that the President had emphasized Jamaica's importance to the U.S. She noted that 700 Jamaicans lived and worked in Guantanamo; many eventually became U.S. citizens.

Request for USG Information on JLP Members re Legal Residence, Any Suspected Criminal Activities

12.(C) Golding then said he needed the Embassy's

assistance with a problem. In the January 14 edition of the "Sunday Gleaner," editorialist Mark Wignall had included an item in his column entitled "Green Card politicians," in which he decried the medical care available to the poor at Kingston Public Hospital, and noted that many Jamaican officials traveled to New York or Florida for medical treatment. The article alleged that: "It now turns out that many of our elected officials possess 'Green cards' and some even enjoy US citizenship status. One part of the declaration by politicians on entering representational politics should be a revelation of their citizenship status."

Golding asked whether, if he were to provide the Embassy a list of JLP members, we would be able to tell him "on a confidential basis" whether they held U.S. legal residence. He then said he also would greatly appreciate knowing if the U.S. suspected any JLP members of involvement in narco-trafficking or other criminal activity. He said he would use this information carefully, but wanted to do whatever he could to keep the JLP clean, noting that "I don't like surprises." He then said he had made a similar inquiry with Emboffs about a year ago, and at that time had been told that any request for USG information regarding Jamaican citizens would have to be made "government-to-government." Ambassador said the Embassy would consider his requests and provide answers in due course.

13.(C) Golding then inquired about the "level of collaboration" between U.S. and Jamaican police. Ambassador responded that cooperation was very close, both in exchanges of information and intelligence and in training. Golding noted that Police Commissioner Lucius Thomas, whenever asked his priorities, always cited "getting rid of corrupt police" as the highest, even ahead of equipment and training needs. Golding said police officers should start their careers on contracts of 3-5 years, so that, if they were suspected of corruption, they could be dismissed, even if the evidence against them was insufficient for a formal tribunal. Samuda agreed that police corruption was a serious problem, and cited an instance in which a lengthy ongoing investigation suddenly had been transferred to another section and then "botched" under highly suspicious circumstances. The Ambassador observed that many of Jamaica's problems resembled those of New York City some years ago. Samuda noted that New York seemed to have done a better job of dealing with homelessness than many other cities, and said he would be interested in knowing how it had been accomplished. Ambassador said she would request some information from her friends in the New York City Government.

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